

Treasuring Children: Helping Children In Chronically Difficult Families

By Brenda Spina, M.S., LMFT, LPC

There is much that has been written about the effects of addiction on the lives of the children in the home. Without a doubt, children are the innocent victims of the addicts' choices and beliefs. I don't think any of us would disagree with the fact that life for these children is confusing, lonely, and often filled with neglect. Spoken or unspoken rules about talking, feeling, trusting and touching can cloud the child's ability to trust. No matter the situation there are a few things that will be important to the child's ability to move in the direction of healing.

First, do not avoid the truth. The child needs to be told the truth. God has designed each of us to know the truth when we hear it. It is the internal base sense of knowing right from wrong, hurt and shame from love and security. As we all know, addicts, no matter the addiction, may be mean when acting out their addiction. To be dishonest further confuses and has the potential for isolating a child who already feels isolated and wounded emotionally.

Secondly, tell the child of the family member's addiction is not their fault. There are many possible causes for any addiction. No child was ever designed to carry such a burden. The "7 C's" written out by the National Association of Adult Children of Alcoholics are often helpful. They are:

I didn't CAUSE it.
I can't CURE it.
I can't CONTROL it.
I can CARE for myself.
By COMMUNICATING my feelings,
Making healthy CHOICES, and
By CELEBRATING myself.

Third, make sure the children know they are not alone. Children of addicts are often feeling frightened, alone, and ashamed. Whether it is a group at their school, church, or a community agency, provide information that lets them know there is a safe place to talk. They need to know that children everywhere are in the same situation that they are experiencing. Minimizing the isolation is one beginning for helping children move toward becoming all that God originally intended.

Finally, don't promise more than you can deliver. Children of addicts have often been promised gifts and time only to be disappointed when they do not materialize. A commitment of this sort demands that we as loved ones and caregivers know our own limits so as not to recreate the hurt. Only God can make promises and be trusted to keep them. His Word is filled with His promises. One of my favorites is Lamentations 3:22-24; "The steadfast love of the LORD

never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

The precious innocence of children is to be treasured and respected. Our own faith is to be that of a child. We desire steadfast love and renewed mercies. How can we but give the same to the children entrusted to our care, no matter the situation?

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P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920

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